

INTRODUCTION

Unless you're an only child, you grew up with siblings—brothers and sisters. I have two older sisters. I'm the third and last child and that's probably why I turned out to be so perfect! ☺ Most of you who have siblings know very well the petty fights that can happen, and you might not have always gotten along with your siblings. You all know full well that you can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family!

Illustration: A Sunday School teacher was speaking to a group of children about the things money can't buy. The teacher said, "Money can't buy laughter and money can't buy love." To drive this point home the teacher asked the children, "What would you do if I offered you \$1,000 not to love your mother and father?" There was silence for a moment, and one little boy raised his hand and asked, "How much would you pay me not to love my big sister?"

You might have grown up in a small family, or a large family. You might have come from a blended family or a broken family, but we all understand the meaning of the word, "family." The beautiful truth that we're going to examine today from God's Word reveals we were once slaves to sin, but now we're siblings—we are brothers and sisters in Christ. You and I are spiritual siblings because we have the same Father.

The chapter and verse divisions we have in our English Bible were added centuries after the Bible was written, and sometimes there are chapter breaks where there shouldn't be. There shouldn't be a break between the last thought in Galatians 3 and the beginning of chapter 4. So let's start reading in Galatians 3:29.

Galatians 3:29–4:7. "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights [adoption] of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son [that's why I've titled this message "No Longer Slaves But Sons"]; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir."

There are many ways to share your faith. Campus Crusade had produced an excellent tract called "The Four Spiritual Laws." Billy Graham's organization has distributed millions of "How to have peace with God." Ray Comfort has an excellent strategy of using the Law of God to show a person their need for the forgiveness of sins. But, still, one of the best witnessing tools is simply your personal testimony because it's personal. It's your story. Over the years, I have shared with you numerous times about sharing your testimony or writing your testimony. There are three basic parts to every testimony. First, you talk about your life before Christ; then you talk about how you came to know Christ; and then you talk about how your life is different since Jesus came into your heart.

Illustration: I love talking with other believers about how they came to Christ because it tells me a lot about them personally. For some, when I ask them how they were converted, some believers' eyes light up and I can see the passion and joy of salvation as they tell me how they came to know the Lord. Sadly, there are others who, when I ask about their conversion, there is no joy, no passion... and some simply just say, "I've been a Christian all my life." And that's it! They don't want share or recount the joy of their salvation. It's very sad. In other instances, after I have asked about their conversion, and they simply give me a one word or one sentence answer... they then don't bother asking about my conversion to Christ. They would rather continue talking about the weather! Let me urge each and every one of you here today... if there is no joy and happiness and passion and excitement over how you came to know the Lord when talking with other believers, then how on earth will you be able to share your testimony with an unbeliever??? "Yeah... come to Jesus 'cause He's really great...???" Ask God to re-ignite your first love!!

In these verses Paul is reviewing the spiritual biography of every believer. He describes all three parts of our testimony. First, he points out we were slaves to the law of sin before Christ. Next, he reveals what God did to bring us to salvation. And finally, we learn how our life is different once we are part of the family of God. So let's dig a little deeper into our spiritual biography of how God changed us from slaves to siblings.

1. WHAT I WAS WITHOUT CHRIST: A slave to this world's system

"When we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world" (v.3). Paul gives an example of a child who may be an heir to a huge inheritance. Until that child reaches the age of maturity, his or her inheritance is under the control of trustees or guardians. In that case, the child is no different than a slave, his or her life is under someone else's control. He took that legal fact and turned it into a spiritual truth. We were once slaves to the basic principles of the world. He isn't talking about the world as planet Earth; the world is a mindset that is opposed to God's Word. So, what are the basic principles of the world? They haven't changed over the past 2,000 years. Just listen to what you hear people say: "It's a dog-eat-dog world." To put it another way, "Look out for #1." The world's system says, "Only the strong survive."

When you read the word "slave" in the New Testament, don't visualize African-American slavery of the 18th-19th century. Rather, think about slaves in the Roman Empire. In 1959, the classic movie, "Ben Hur," won the academy award for best picture. In it, Charlton Heston plays the lead role of Judah Ben Hur – a Jewish prince and merchant Jerusalem at the beginning of the 1st century. Due to an accident, Ben Hur becomes a Roman slave. In one of the most memorable scenes, Ben Hur is a galley slave chained to other slaves beneath the deck of a Roman warship. He has no freedom. He is chained to a life of endless toil and sweat. He was chained to a ship that would soon sink.

That's a picture of all of us before we met Christ. We were slaves to sin. In John 8:34 Jesus said, *"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."* Before Jesus came and made His place in my heart, I was a slave to sin. Like Ben Hur, I was chained to a sinking ship. But Jesus came into my heart and set me free.

A lot of Christians mistakenly think when Jesus comes into their hearts they should be totally free from sin. There's a very important distinction. Before Jesus I was a slave to sin. But after Jesus came into my heart, I'm no longer a slave, but I still struggle with sin. Folks, the reality is that even though you have come to Christ and are now Christians, you will still struggle with sin. This does not mean that you are not saved. If you feel bad and guilty about your sin, this is a good sign that the Holy Spirit is bringing conviction to your heart. God is working in you to bring about repentance. You know what would be terrible? If you could easily sin, and feel absolutely no remorse, or guilt, or shame over it. The truth is that everyone is a sinner, and there are only two kinds of sinners: Forgiven sinners and unforgiven sinners.

Most of us are very familiar with the struggle the Apostle Paul wrote about in Romans 7 when he described his struggle with his sinful nature. He says the bad things he doesn't want to do, he finds himself doing. And the good things he really wants to do, he doesn't do them consistently. Can you relate to that? He finally cries out in frustration, *"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin."* (Romans 7:24-25)

Notice Paul didn't say he was a slave to sin, but in his sinful nature, he was a slave to the LAW of sin. You see, I'm a slave to the law of gravity. That means if I jump up I'm going to fall back down. The law of gravity works in Waterford West. Have you noticed? The higher I jump, the harder I'm going to fall. And if I jump from a ten-story building, I'm not going to break the law of gravity; I'm going to be broken on it!

Paul identified the law of sin in *Romans 7:21: "So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me."* The law of sin Paul discovered is that the more he tried to be good in his own strength, the more he fell into sin. He harder he tried NOT to sin, the more he sinned. C. S. Lewis summarized the law of sin when he wrote: *"No man knows how bad he is until he has tried to be good."* Even when we come to Christ we still struggle with our self-centred sin nature. One poet once wrote: *"There is an eagle in me that wants to soar, and there is a hippopotamus in me that wants to wallow in the mud."* So how do we break free from the law of sin? The same way we break free from the law of gravity. Every time we fly on an airplane we invoke a higher, stronger law than the law of gravity, the law of aerodynamics.

When you're struggling with sin, don't stop reading at Romans 7. Go on into Romans 8 where Paul wrote about a law that is stronger and more powerful than the law of sin. It is the law of the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us. So while I may struggle with sin, I don't have to be a slave to sin when I allow the Holy Spirit of Jesus to rule in me. That's the truth. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. Let's look at the next component of our testimony.

2. WHAT GOD HAS DONE: At the perfect time, God sent His Son to buy me back

"When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law." (v.4) This verse is one that is often used at Christmas because it talks about Jesus being born. But there is so much more in this verse than just the birth of Jesus. What does it mean that Jesus was born of a woman? Why didn't it say, "Born of a man and a woman?" When a birth announcement is sent today we often read that a certain child was born to John and Jane Citizen but the Bible never says Jesus was born of Joseph and Mary. He was the Son of God, born of a woman. There's a prophetic reason why Paul chose this exact language. Jesus fulfilled the very first Messianic prophecy in the Bible.

The first prophecy about Jesus is found on the third page of your Bible. After the serpent deceived Eve and they had disobeyed God, Adam and Eve realized they were guilty. The lie of Satan is still that sin won't hurt you, when the truth is that sin enslaves you.

After God came searching for the guilty pair, He pronounced a curse upon the serpent. He said to Satan, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel"* (Genesis 3:15). Satan's offspring are those who live their lives separated from God's love. When Galatians 4:4 says Jesus was *"born of a woman"* this is a literal fulfilment of this prophecy. The wicked serpent tried to strike at the heel of the Messiah. But at the cross, Jesus crushed the head of the serpent. A heel wound isn't fatal, but no one survives a crushed head.

Jesus came to "redeem those under the law." When we were in shackles, enslaved to sin, Jesus came to remove our chains, taking them up on his sinless shoulders. To redeem means to "buy back." One of my favourite pictures of Jesus is as the Redeemer from the book of Hosea. Hosea was married to a woman named Gomer. After they had their first child, Gomer began to grow restless, and she became a wayward wife. They had a couple of more sons, one named, "not my kin" which probably meant Hosea wasn't the father. Gomer's downward spiral continued until she deserted her husband and family to live the life of a prostitute. Finally her lovers grew tired of her and she was tossed aside. Gomer had to sell herself into slavery. The human response from a scorned husband would have been, *"She made her bed, let her lie in it."* But Hosea displayed the stubborn love and the amazing grace of God. You see, Gomer was still Hosea's wife and he searched for her until he found her dishevelled, destitute, and chained to an auction block in a filthy slave market. When the bidding began, Hosea joined the bidding. Out of his great love for her, he was committed to redeem her. Finally he won the auction and paid fifteen shekels of silver and thirteen bushel of grain. (Hosea 3:2) He forgave her and brought her back into his home to be his wife.

This is a powerful parable of the compassion that God has for those of us who have been slaves to sin. Jesus came to redeem us. He came to buy us back. But he paid something much more precious than silver or grain. The Bible says, *"It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."* (1 Peter 1:18-19)

Sometimes when we give our testimony we want to talk about what WE have done. We often say, "I gave my heart to Christ." Or we say, "I invited Jesus into my heart." And while both those statements are true, our salvation isn't about what WE have done; it's about what God has done. And God sent His son to redeem us. The third part of your testimony is how your life has changed since you came to know Christ.

3. WHAT I AM IN CHRIST: An adopted child in a love relationship with Abba

“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts... who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’” (v.6) Paul wrote that Jesus redeemed us that we might have the full rights of sons, the word used is often translated “adoption.” Many couples make a difference in the lives of orphans either through adoption or they provide foster care. I just want to point out a difference between a modern adoption and the word that appears in Galatians 4:5.

The word “adoption” in Galatians 4:5 comes from two Greek words, huios, which means “son” and thesia, which means “legal standing.” In the Roman culture, a son could be born into a family, but he wasn’t yet a citizen of Rome. When he reached an age of about 14 he would undergo a ceremony called toga virilis. He would lay aside the toga of a child and be given the toga of a man. His name would be added to the census of Roman citizens, and he would now have full legal standing as a son of his father. This might have been what Paul had in mind when he wrote in *1 Corinthians 13:11, “When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.”*

Illustration: A little girl asked her mother where she came from. The mother said God created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and they became the parents of the human race. Then she went and asked her father the same question. He told her we all come from monkeys who evolved into human beings. The little girl was confused. She went back to her mom and said, “Mom, you said that God created us and daddy says that we came from monkeys. How can you both be right?” Her mother said, “Which one is it?” She said, “Sweetheart, that’s easy. I told you about my side of the family, and your father told you about his side of the family.”

Actually, there are two ways you can become a part of a biological family. You can be born into a family, or adopted into a family. To become a part of the family of God, you experience both birth and adoption. You are born again spiritually, and then God adopts you by giving you the full standing in His Forever Family. When God places us in His family, He gives us His Holy Spirit to live inside of us. And the indwelling of the Holy Spirit enables us to call God, “Abba.” The Bible says, *“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. [We’re no longer slaves, but sons. And that’s the same word found in Galatians 4:4—full standing as a legal heir] And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”* (Romans 8:15-16)

Mention the word “Abba” to people of any generation and they think back to the Swedish Pop group that gave us 1970s songs like “Dancing Queen” and “Fernando” and “Money Money Money.” We skated to their music at the skating rinks and danced to it at our discos. Their music has enjoyed numerous revivals which also included a hit Broadway musical and movie, “Mama Mia.” They didn’t name their group after this word for God. The four letters in Abba are the first letters in the four names of the members of the group (Agnetha, Benny, Björn, and Anni).

But in the Bible the word “Abba” means something much deeper. Perhaps the most revolutionary thing Jesus taught is that we can call God, “Abba.” He used “Abba” as the term we can use when we pray. In the model prayer, He taught us to pray, *“Our Father (Abba) who is in heaven...”* Abba is an Aramaic word that speaks of intimacy and tenderness. When a Jewish child would look into the face of his father, one of his or her first words would be “Abba.” Our best translation would be “Da-daa” or “Papa.”

People all around us are having identity crises. They go to therapy, or attend seminars to discover their inner selves. They search out their family tree, or try to build their sense of self-worth by their achievements and awards. But if you want to know who you really are, you are ABBA’S CHILD. That’s more important than any other sense of self-identity you could ever find. I’m a husband, a father, a minister, a police officer and a builder, but none of those come close to comparing to the wonder that I am “Abba’s child.”

Do you realize how much God really loves you? The answer to that question has to be, “No.” Because you can never comprehend the height, the breadth, and the depth of God’s love for you. Author Brennan Manning wrote a book entitled, Abba’s Child. He writes: *“It takes a profound conversion to accept that God is relentlessly tender and compassionate toward us just as we are—not IN SPITE of our sins and faults (that would not be total acceptance), but WITH them. Though God does not condone or sanction evil, He does not withhold His love because there is evil in us.”* (Abba’s Child, p. 20)

I'm not a son of God because I'm good: I'm not. I'm not a son of God because I deserve it: I don't. I'm not a son of God because I obey all the rules in the Bible: I can't. I'm a son of God because He has chosen to have a love relationship with me.

Ben-Hur Movie: Let's go back to the "Ben Hur" movie for a minute. The last time we saw him, he was chained in the bowels of the ship as a galley slave. The ship is rammed and chaos ensues. As the water gushes into the ship, Ben Hur frees the other slaves and dives into the water. In the process he saves the life of the commanding Roman general, Quintus Arrius. To show his gratitude Arrius petitions the Roman Emperor Tiberius to free Ben Hur from slavery. After Ben Hur receives his freedom, then Arrius adopts him as his son. Ben Hur is legally free, but he is still enslaved to his rage and bitterness. He still seeks revenge against the Roman who made him a slave.

But then fast-forward to the crucifixion of Jesus. Ben Hur is watching Jesus die on the cross. There is a powerful scene of the cross. It's pouring rain, and the camera captures the blood of Jesus running into the rainwater that flows away from the cross. The blood can be seen as it flows down the hill and into the whole world. Ben Hur's sister and mother are miraculously cured of their leprosy, and Ben Hur is healed from his hatred and bitterness. Even though he was legally freed from slavery and adopted into a Roman family, it wasn't until that moment that he was truly set free and adopted into God's family.

That's a beautiful picture of what God has done for us. You no longer have to be a slave to the world or your own sinful nature. When you kneel at the cross of Jesus, you can experience freedom, forgiveness, and God adopts you into His family. And God is no longer some strange, scary Deity who you refer to just as 'God'. He now makes it possible for you to call Him, "Abba," "Papa," "Daddy."

CONCLUSION

God called me to preach when I was 19 years old. At that time, I was consistently spending more and more time in God's word and in prayer because I wanted to get to know God better. I soon attended a Bible College for three years and learned about theology, hermeneutics, Biblical exposition, Bible & church history, sermon preparation & pastoral care. I also learned about some aspects of the original languages of the Bible. I did all this because I felt God calling me to do it and because I wanted to know more about God.

But I still never really understood the real nature of God until 17th April 2001. You see, on that day my first child, Alexis, was born. And on that day, I learned more about God in five minutes than I had learned since all my previous training. When I held her for the first time and looked into her eyes, I was completely overwhelmed with a powerful sense of love. I realised for the first time that God regarded me with the same kind of intense love. I loved my child and would do anything for her... and I came to understand that God's love for me is a billion times more powerful.

We brought her home from the hospital, and I soon discovered she didn't do anything to earn my love. In fact, she was totally self-centred. When she was hungry in the middle of the night, she thought nothing of waking me up with her loud cries. Can you believe it? She couldn't feed herself. She couldn't bathe herself or dress herself. She made US do that! Yet in spite of all her selfish habits, I loved her unconditionally.

And remember the first time she looked at me and said, "Da-da." It made my day. And later when she grew a little older and I would come home from work she'd come running up holding out her arms yelling, "Daddy's home!" And of course, I'd grab her up in my arms and just let her love me as I loved on her. And God graciously gave me another child, Jacob, and I loved him just as much. They're both now 13 and 11 years old and my love for them is still as strong as ever.

Some of you are parents, and as much as we love our children, our heavenly Abba Father loves you even more than that. Even if you aren't a parent, I can assure you Abba loves you more than you can imagine in your wildest dreams. And when you lift your face to heaven or raise your hands to heaven and say, "Abba," the Creator of the Universe loves you as if you were the only person in all of creation. And yes, we're all self-centred and make plenty of mistakes, but Abba's love for you is unconditional. He doesn't love you because you're perfect, you are perfected IN His love. I don't know about you, but I'd much rather be a son than a slave. *"Thank you, Father, that we are no longer slaves. By Your grace, You have made us Your children and spiritual brothers and sisters with each other!"*